212 Communication among the Amhara can be said to be formal on all
195 matters of culture focus. Writing is regarded by the Amhara as relegated to formal use, and schoolboys were penalized for experimenting with it informally. Language, however, being oral and thus less controllable, compensates for this; and artistic expression and experimentation make free and often playful and inventive use of the lexical, grammatical, and syntactical raw material of language.

A. The Raw Material of the Amharic Language Put to Use.

a) Historical Development

197 Much of the lexical matter and most of the grammar of the Amharic language, also the basis of the alphabet that it uses, are derived from Geez, one of the South Arabian languages of about 500 B.C. The term "Lasana Geez" the language of the Geez, has, among Abyssinians, the connotation of "language of the free men", i.e. conquerors. Linguistic scholars have raised the question whether one single language, Geez, was imported from Southern Arabia about that time, or whether different, possibly related, languages came from there via separate channels at different times. The latter theory seems more likely, and Amharic may owe the Semitic part of its character to a sister language of Geez, rather than to Geez itself (footnote 85). But the Amhara firmly believe in the derivation from Geez itself - and directly.

197 Whether directly or indirectly derived originally, certain it is
192 that for many centuries and quite consciously even today, the Amhara have been borrowing freely and proudly from the Geez language any term useful particularly to express abstract concepts, in which Amharic is

Footnote 85 - Theory of Professor Marcel Cohen, quoted by Leslau Archaic Features in South Ethiopia. (See Bibliography).

197 sometimes poor, but Geez very rich. In fact, linguistic purists among
192 modern-nationalistic educated Amharas, urge rejection of foreign loan-words in favor of continued and even revived borrowing from Geez cognates.

212 The Amharic script, largely derived from ancient Sabean characters, is, unlike other Semitic scripts, written from left to right. The characters are syllabic, based on 26 consonants from Geez, plus 4 labiovelar diphthongs, plus 7 additional consonants added in Amharic and called "yäarab fidäl" (lit. the Arabic alphabet). These 37 consonants in Amharic are always written in syllabic form, combined with one of 7 vowal orders, so that students must learn a syllabic alphabet of 259 characters. There are also 20 symbols for numerals, which are still taught, and even printed in the modern press, and not replaced by the simpler Arabic numerals; though the latter have been recently taught. These characters and numerals are now printed on a sheet that also includes the Gospel of St. John, in Geez, and a photograph of Emperor Haile Selassie; pasted on a cardboard, this sheet is now carried to school by the young students.

197 Amharic also derives a considerable part of its raw material from
192 Cushitic languages spoken in Ethiopia prior to (and after) the Semitic colonization, perhaps more so than any other Abyssinian language (footnote 86). From these Cushitic sources Amharic obtains part of its vocabulary (especially most of its terms relating to concrete matters),

Footnote 86 - Leslau: Southeast Semitic
Leslau: Observations on Gurage Documents
Leslau: Review of Cohen's Nouvelles Etudes d'Ethiopien Meridional
Cohen, M.: Traité de la Langue Amharique
Houghton: Aspects of Amharic

197 most of its syntax, morphology (such as the "frequentative"), phonology
192 such as considerable onomatopoetry and monosyllabic words (though some of these may have been carried in Geez also). The result of this linguistic blend is a number of expressive choices somewhat analogous to the choice in English between Anglo-Saxon cognates and Latin-French cognates: e.g. the word "sun" can be expressed as "sahay" (from Geez) or "jembar" (from Cushitic). Amhara people use these alternates in many ways: to emphasize distinction between "sacred" and "profane", between the philosophic and the prosaic.

578 For, to the mind of the Amhara, Geez and its derivatives are
197 spiritually connected with the church liturgy, with philosophy. Even
186 in the present situation of change, feudal conservatives and the church have banded together most strongly against the suggested simplification of the Amharic alphabet (which is recommended for quicker learning, expecially by illiterate adults of other ethnic groups in Ethiopia; and for devising typewriters). This traditional, religious conservatism is now being reinforced by the new and incipient group of nationalistic, linguistic purists, who bemoan the introduction of more and more European cognates. But the latter group is still small and does not have nearly the political power of the old-style religious conservatives.

197 Finally, the often-repeated qualification with regard to the effect of regional differences applies to linguistic matters also. In different regions, derivations from different Cushitic languages affect all phases of the language, particularly the lexical.

192 b) Lexical, Grammatical and Syntactical Phases.

The Amharic vocabulary is rich in onomatopoetic terms which have been formalized:

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"kul kul" - to call the chickens. (Footnote 87)

"fwa fwa" - cascade, waterfall.

"täb alä" - drop by drop ("alä", lit. he went, is the common auxiliary).

"täf täf alä" - poured liquid from a narrow-necked bottle.

"twa alä" - water falling on fire.

"cha alä" - became silent, tranquil, calm; hence - deserted village (1)

"chechch alä" - began to chant; hence - birds in the morning (Twitter).

"gwawqa alä" - knocked loudly at door

"kof kof alä"- marched with gravity (sound of shoes).

"encheq alä" - (sound of) picking feet from muddy place.

"agurämarrämä" - murmured (sound of large drum), hence - rolling thunder, and incipient rebellion.

"anchabächchätä" - clapped hands rythmically, to keep time for music, or to greet a "great man" (Africa style).

"andagaddaga" - made gluglu (water through pipe).

193 Grammar, called "qoasso" or "säwasew", is mastered only by the
195 traditional-educated church scholars ("mäzhär") and a few members of
554 noble families. Perhaps only a few hundred individuals master all its intricacies. Emperor Haile Selassie's speeches strike the average

[192] Footnote 87 - Other calls to animals include:
"Kulel Kulel" - to call lost donkey at night.
"Kes Kes" - (or "cheg") to drive sheep on
"Kis Kis" - to drive calves on.
"Buch Buch" - call to dogs.
"Wush" - to drive loaded donkeys from path, so the master can ride through
"Che" or "Mich" - to get a horse or mule started when riding it.

264 procedure, also called "qämmäsä" is in imitation of procedure at the court of nobles, and it is known that kings have always had their special cupbearers ("qänash") who tasted the drink against possible poison, and who also removed any floating debris ("gäffata") such as beeswax from the drink.

574 The hospitality group on non-kin members which meets most
575 regularly, once a month, is the "mahabbär" association, already described. Based originally on religious private communion, each member plays host once a month to drink from "Mary's cup" ("yämaryam sewa"), to feast, for chant and dance ("zäffan") and less formal gossipy entertainment and conversation ("tächawwäta").

C. Verbal Expression: Formalities; Wit; Pedagogic Riddles.

192 Emotional exclamations in everyday use are highly formalized:

Pain - "häyy häyy" (also if a painful truth "sinks in"; astonishment).

Fear - "woyy" (especially by women, just before a fearful event happens).

Fearful surprise - "oyyi" (e.g. when someone stumbles, or has an accident).

Alarm - "errii" - (cry of alarm; also of great sorrow as in death of kin).

Skeptical surprise - "erra" ("you don't say?!"); Reply: "mut" (abbreviated from "yemut", lit. "May (the emperor die) if this is not true").

Pleasure - "essäy" (to indicate comfort, e.g. when sitting down after having climbed a long, tiring hill).

576 Formal politeness in etiquette always considers the social status
514 of the person addressed. Thus, there are six ways of informing an
192 inquirer that the person he seeks has gone out to defecate or urinate:

Impolite, though not vulgar: "weha afässäsä" - (lit. he poured water).

Polite: "der wätta" - (lit. he went to the bush).

Polite: "däj wätta" - (lit. he went out the door).

576 Very Polite: "shango watta" - (lit. he went to a meeting).
514
492 Extremely Polite: "gwaro zorä" - (lit. he left home).

Extremely Polite: "shersher watta" - (lit. he went for a walk).

522 Wit, used in court or by homespun philosophers to entertain their friends, compensates for the many formalities in this culture and society. The famous wit, Alaqa Gäbre-Hanna has already been cited. 538 Proverbs, "tarat" and riddles may be used to make a comment of esoteric meanings, understandable only to one's initiates. Proverbs fulfill a social function, beyond mere entertainment, for even philosophy, being utilized to begin any negotiation, such as for marriage. This is emphasized in proverbs on proverbs:

[539] "Like Halleluyah before the chanting (in church),
(begin with) a proverb before the discussion".
"(to drink) mead, (first get) a container,
to talk, (begin with) a proverb".

538 Proverbs and riddles used by parents, teachers and leaders of
593 society have a pedagogic function, and can be used to reprimand and
[86] instruct. Conflict between father and son, the complexities involved, and the possibility that contrary to the major cultural assumption of parental superiority, the son may sometimes have logic on his side, is indicated by the following:

[539] "(Says the father):

"Your Father you cannot accuse (e.g. in court, shaming yourself)
nor plow the sky,
nor roast water".

"(Replies the son):

"The father, by his own shame he will stand accused;
the sky, by lighting it is plowed;
water, in a pot it is steamed".

164 The epidemiology of diphtheria in Africa is still little known. Schick tests have shown high immunity among Ethiopian children, but the occurrence of cases of clinical diphtheria in the native population is unknown.

Every year rabies has claimed a large number of Ethiopians. Until 1927 no treatment was available nearer than Cairo. [744] Since then, treatment has been given in Addis Ababa. The number of rabid dogs in Ethiopia is very large, but little is known of the number of persons bitten outside the capital. It is estimated that approximately 100 persons receive treatment in Addis Ababa every month.

Dengue is common in the northern part of the Harar plateau. It was found quite commonly among Italians at Diredawa and I can remember several fellow travelers coming down with this disease after a night spent in that town. Some control has been attempted since 1943, but until a health service is organized, effective control will not be possible.

Disease terms in Amharic:

164 A number of diseases have clear terms in the Amharic language. Of the venereal ●192 diseases, syphilis is referred to as *kitigne* in its early form while later manifestations are called *worde*. The rheumatic pains, *kurtemaat*, so frequently complained of, are often syphilitic. Gonorrhoea is generally called *chapto* (actually to squeeze, or it squeezes me). The word for malaria is *wobah* (*r*). *Nidad* (i.e., it caught fire) is also used, but may be used for several types of fever. Relapsing fever is called *mitch* and is generally differentiated by the population from typhus fever which is called *tessibo*. Smallpox is called *fantata* and chicken-pox is recognized as a distinct disease called *kuffin*. Diarrhoea is called *tekmat*, which literally means "what makes to sit down." In asking a patient whether he has fever, the word *tekusat* is used. The patient with fever will generally have put a band dipped in cold water around his head.

[p 723 B]

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

As for the beginning and end of the world, all Amhara believe that the world was created at one time by the will of God. When the eighth millennium arrives, moreover (A.D. 2508), God will bring about a major upheaval, either destroying the world completely or, as others believe, turning it upside down. According to the latter view, all those who live at that time will perish, while those who died first in the world's history will return to life, to a time of renewal, when a little grain will go a long way and the milk of one cow will nourish a multitude.

The Amhara peasant's view of nature is matter-of-fact. There are a few traces of animism, such as the association of certain kinds of trees with holy places and the belief that whatever is planted on the monthly commemoration of Christ's birth will dry up and die. There are a few touches of aesthetic appreciation, such as the peasant's wonderment over a remarkable view when it is thrust upon him and his desire, when feasible, to locate his home in an attractive locale. But there is certainly no idealization, religious or secular, of the great outdoors. The peasant much prefers to get out of the bright sunshine and rest in the dark, smoky interior of his hut. When he sits gazing over the hills and slopes of his gorgeous country, he is probably counting his livestock or noticing how the grain is growing.*

The Amhara peasant's life is so much a part of nature that he does not view it as a separate category of experience; there is no word for "nature" in his vocabulary. Nor is there a sense that the things of nature have minds or laws of their own. Nature is simply the passive agent of God's rewards and punishments; for example, the man who fails to keep the Orthodox fasts will find that his crops are ruined.

For his part, the peasant's adjustment to nature is a straightforward practical one. He has no drive to conquer or to be master over nature; he has no inclination to fuse or lose himself in nature; he has no need to keep nature in equilibrium through a system of rituals. His perception of natural objects is in terms of what will assist or hinder eking out a subsistence. The farm animals are his friends, and must be taken care of properly or else they will die and he will be without their help. The wild beasts are his enemies, and they must be guarded against or else they will eat his crops, his livestock, or himself. The fields must be plowed at the right time each year or the bins will become empty, and knowing the right time depends upon a sufficient knowledge of weather to judge the coming of the various kinds of rain.

Thus, the motif in the Amhara peasant's orientation toward nature is to get what one can out of what nature readily provides, neither neglecting one's responsibilities to keep things running as nature requires, nor inflicting any

* All the TAT respondents interpreted card No. 4, showing two men sitting on a ridge overlooking a natural panorama, in terms of taking care of the grazing animals and becoming wealthy.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

Still another invidious distinction of considerable importance in the Amhara outlook is that between the "big man" (*ṭilliq saw*) and the commoner (*terā saw*). "Bigness" may be measured in terms of political power, economic wealth, ecclesiastical status, or any combination thereof. Though the peasant frequently has little affection for the big man, he customarily treats him with the greatest show of deference. No matter how unfamiliar a big man may be or from what part of the country he comes, the Amhara peasant sees him as entitled to unquestioning courtesy and obeisance. Analogous distinctions discriminate between the wealthy (*hābtām*) and the poor (*dehā*), and between the genteel (*ṣhawā*) and the rude (*bālagē*).

Yet if the Amhara takes a dim view of women, youth, and poor folk, as well as non-Amhara and non-Christians, he suffers from no illusions about homo sapiens at his best—unless they are dark illusions. The generic word for "man" in Amharic, *saw*, is the subject of a number of negative associations and idiomatic uses.[12] At its worst, the word is found in an idiom that signifies the evil eye (*ya-saw ayn*), literally: the "eye of man" (or, more idiomatically, "the eye of others"). At its best, when used to signify a fully formed human being, the word *saw* characteristically appears in the plaintive saying, *Saw yallam* ("there is no human being"); in other words, an individual who fully embodies the concept of humanity does not exist. In general, one may say that the Amhara's view of human nature is dominated by his perception of man's inherent aggressiveness and untrustworthiness.

The Amhara believes that unformed human nature is poor raw material, and that without strict punishment throughout childhood a person will grow up to be rude and offensive toward others. As an adult, moreover, he must constantly be kept in check. The rationale commonly given for the extensive schedule of fasting is that man's nature is wicked, and only by weakening himself in this manner will he be turned away from some act of aggression against others.

The Amharic concept of *ṭegābaññā* illustrates this view. *Ṭegābaññā* literally carries the meaning of one who has been sated with food and drink, but is normally taken to mean someone who begins to insult and pick fights with others. In their use of this and related words the Amhara express the belief that aggression is the usual consequence of being sated. Insubordinate behavior on the part of a servant or political appointee is usually explained as a result of his having been too well fed. "When a peasant gets sated he hits with his stick. . . " is the first line of a number of couplets I collected among rural Amhara. The specific effect of drinking alcoholic beverages is believed to release, not Eros, but the aggressive instincts. An Amharic proverb about *ṭallā* states this directly: "One [glass] whets the appetite; two quenches it; three heats one up; four makes one quarrel; five brings fighting; six causes killing." Contrary to the view that world peace depends chiefly on filling

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The ultimate model for these constellations of servants and retainers was, of course, the imperial court. The *makuännent* imitated the behavior of the emperor as much as it was within their means, prerogatives, and sense of discretion to do so. Thus, like the emperor, a nobleman never traveled on foot, but on the back of a caparisoned mule; with as many retainers as possible, shouldering spears or rifles, on the run behind him. He enjoyed a number of quasi-royal privileges: the authority to have cattle slaughtered and to have *tajj* prepared in his home; the right to wear a *barnos*, the dark wool cloak of the nobility; the use of an imported parasol, though not of the scarlet color reserved for the emperor, and of the horsehair fly-switch. In general, the Abyssinian noble attempted to behave like a king in his own sphere of influence and to reproduce in his own court that of the emperor. As d'Abbadie noted:

> A lord of even mediocre importance names his seneschal, his provost, his guards, a foreman of domestics, a chief baker, a butler, a squire, and various captains and pages; then he sets up a hierarchy often in ridiculous disproportion to his position; his inferiors do the same, and there is no one down to the well-to-do peasant who does not institute certain offices and analogous grades in his home. The Ethiopians often laugh about it themselves.[22]

A passion for acquiring titles is the obverse of the Abyssinian's penchant for instituting offices and grades. A man's title, *ya-mä'erg sem* ("name of rank"), has been the major indicator of the deference which is due him. Honorific titles and the paraphernalia appropriate to them are perhaps the most sought after possessions in traditional Abyssinia, for they confer inalienable status. Even if fate should deprive a man of all his wealth and power, he would retain his title until death. If he should become a prisoner, he would be given deferential treatment.

The titles of the nobility were, first and foremost, military titles. The *makuännent* were above all an elite of war lords; and in contemporary Amharic the term *makuännent* (singular *makonnen*) is also used to refer to any commissioned military officer. Their principal ranks, in descending order, are:

rās	"head" (of an army)
dajāzmātch	"general of the (king's) gate"
*fitāwrāri**	"general of the vanguard"
qañāzmātch	"general of the right wing"
gerāzmātch	"general of the left wing"
bālāmbārās	"commander of a fort"
bāshā†	"commander of a rifle corps"
shālaqā	"chief of a thousand"

* In former times the *fitāwrāri* ranked below the *gerāzmātch*.

† *Bāshā* is a Turkish loan word, introduced after the Turko-Abyssinian wars.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

demonstrate some affiliation with the Solomonic line; the marriage of one of these into a local dynasty contributed an added buttress to its traditionalist claims. The other was what seems to be a still more deeply rooted disposition for decentralized hegemony based on the ancient character of the society. For, as Cerulli has recently suggested, the origins of the Ethiopian state were such as to lay the foundation for a persisting order of feudalism. The movement of South Arabs to the Eritrean coast and highlands took place, not through the conquest of an indigenous population by a united invader, as in the Norman Conquest of England, but by the intermittent emigration and settlement of distinct tribes from South Arabia into various parts of the African territory. Thus, Cerulli concludes, we see in Ethiopia "a feudalism expanded from the roots: a number of principalities or peoples which, independent on African land after their emigration, have finally been regrouped in a higher political unity, yet still conserving in the feudal system thus constituted part of their autonomy and their individuality."[37] If this is so, it would constitute an added traditional element in the sense of legitimacy of local dynastic interests.

All this suggests that we must look to two sources for the prestige of the *makuännent*—that recruitment into the secular elite came from "below" as well as from "above." These two bases of noble status are indicated by the etymology of two Amharic words commonly applied to the local nobility, *shum* and *bälabbät*. *Shum* (or *seyum*) comes from a root which means to invest with high position. The emperor, as we have seen, is *seyuma egziabhër* ("invested by God") and he in turn is the source of authority for investing other dignitaries. The status associated with the word *shum* is therefore based on the act of investiture by a sovereign. *Bälabbät*, on the other hand, has the literal meaning, "one who has a father"; in other words, one who has a significant father, a notable ancestry. This status refers to claims to deference which are based on birth.

Claims based on birth, moreover, were closely tied to the ownership of land and supported by local territorial allegiances. This appears most strikingly in the office of *çhïqä shum*, the lowest level official, who is appointed, to be sure, but by the local people themselves from a small number of *bälabbät* whose eligibility for the office rests on their inheritance of rights to certain specified pieces of land. Other local offices, like *malkañña* and *meslanë*, were normally given by regional governors to *bälabbät* indigenous to the area. The sacred sentiment of fealty to a monarch, whose charisma rested both on membership in a hallowed dynasty and the hallowed act of coronation, thus competed in Abyssinian souls with deeply felt sentiments of attachment to members of noted families who symbolized local rights and traditions. Abyssinian political structure at any given time was determined by the relative strength of the forces supported by these two principles of legitimacy.

Neither principle was ever realized in pure form. No matter how great his

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than those necessary to perform their jobs. They do not attempt to maintain and build personal libraries, though there are a few exceptions to this. The three small bookstores in Addis Ababa offer only the most insubstantial fare.

Nor, finally, have more than a handful of private individuals taken upon themselves the charge of a scholarly or literary calling. Although Marcel Cohen heralded the birth of a printed literature in Amharic as early as 1925,[88] writing is still not very important on the Ethiopian scene.* The output of original books and pamphlets in Amharic averaged less than fifteen a year over the past two decades. The presses and bookstores distribute Amharic publications indifferently at best. Much of the literary impetus produced by the desire of many Ethiopians to write, and the obvious need for good writing that would address itself to the intellectual demands of the present generation, has been sapped by economic, political, and cultural factors.

The economic factors include the high cost of printing; the diminutive market; and the absence of publishing houses. If an author wants to be read, he must normally pay for publication himself. Those who cannot must either find a patron in the Crown—frequently a highly lucrative arrangement—or resort to mimeographic duplication, or else remain unpublished. The censorship system and anxiety about spontaneous expression of any sort which has been fostered by prevailing political conditions constitute additional obstacles to literary development.

The paucity of serious writing has been the result no less of prevailing cultural conditions. The low intellectual level of his potential audience, the absence of channels for criticism, and the dearth of precedent make it difficult for the Ethiopian writer to determine good standards of writing. The confused state of Amharic, owing to regional variations and the absence of consensus on neologisms and loan words for expressing modern concepts, poses many problems on the level of sheer vocabulary. The temptation to get into print quickly, if the financial and political barriers can be hurdled, exceeds the temptation to work long and hard on an opus of quality. The desire to pontificate frequently eclipses the quest for understanding.

Those conditions which have inhibited the growth of Amharic literature—poverty, governmental reluctance to provide sufficient freedom and support, the newness of the modernizing culture, and the motivational level of the intellectuals themselves—may be viewed more broadly as responsible for the relative barrenness of Ethiopian intellectual life as a whole. Insofar as these conditions change in the coming decades, a radical change in the quality and organization of Ethiopian intellectual life may be expected. As a sociological

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* This is no longer due, however, to the negative attitude toward writing as such which was discussed in chapter iii. That traditional inhibition has been largely removed—primarily, it seems, by the postwar requirement that all legal accusations and court proceedings be set down in writing.

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THE PHENOMENA OF AMHARA ORALITY

Shortly after an Amhara child is born some butter is placed in his mouth. This is done in the belief that it will keep his voice from becoming harsh. From that moment on, the mouth never ceases to be an organ of extraordinary importance in his life. Its cultural importance is reflected in the attention given to it in the Amharic vocabulary: Baeteman's *Dictionnaire Amarigna-Français* lists some sixty idioms built with the Amharic word for mouth, *af*, more than are listed for any other words in the language except "eye," "heart," and "earth."[4] The organ is publicly celebrated in such proverbs as: "Cleverness of mouth, to the master; cleverness of hand, to the slave."

The oral zone is of course of universal significance. Some items of oral imagery probably appear in most languages, and manifestations of oral libido appear in many forms familiar to Westerners: the French love for gourmandism, the German passion for beer-drinking and singing, the American addiction to cigarettes, chewing gum, and "life-savers." Many of the less familiar phenomena to be related below in describing Amhara orality, moreover, are found in most of the cultures of Africa and the Middle East. But such phenomena often appear inconspicuously alongside other culturally patterned impulses and sublimations stemming from other phases of psychosexual development. What may distinguish the Amhara—and doubtless some other cultures—is the extent to which the oral zone is an object of attention and a source of behavioral modes and expressive symbolism. The Amhara, it appears, have a preoccupation with orality.

This preoccupation is manifest in three different kinds of phenomena. There are, first of all, aspects of Amhara culture which express a strong positive attachment to the infantile experience of sucking, in pure and in numerous sublimated forms. These we shall designate as the phenomena of *oral erotism*. Second, there are the aspects of Amhara culture which express a strong positive attachment to the oral zone as a center for various aggressive activities—the modes which Erikson calls "incorporation by biting," "oral retention," and "oral intrusion." These we shall collectively designate as the phenomena of *oral sadism*. Finally, there are phenomena which express a conflict about the gratification of many of these oral desires; and these we shall refer to as the phenomena of *oral ambivalence*.

Oral Erotism

Feeding at the breast is a prominent and beloved experience in Amhara life. The Amhara infant is suckled whenever he wishes, at the slightest show of desire. Since he is rarely separated from his mother it is easy for him to satisfy himself at any time of day or night. Popular beliefs about breast-feed-